



JDM NIRVANA

Words: Myles K. Williams

Pics: Jeremy Edwards

» THE GT LIVE MEDIA DAY

The story of GT Live is as much a tale of racing as it is one man's dream: to see a premier sports car race series come to the United States, bringing with it the mystique and passion of millions of sports car fans, in particular, fans of Japanese sports cars.

This fan is Randy Grube. Randy is the founder and CEO of Paramax, a California-based corporate marketing and product development firm. A longtime Japanese sports

car enthusiast, Grube was one of the many American fans who had gone so far as to travel to Japan to experience events first-hand. It has been Randy's vision to bring the series to the USA known as JGTC: Japanese Grand Touring Championship. Since 1994 over 383,000 spectators have witnessed this series in Japan, and now Randy's vision has come full circle, from a mere dream to reality. It is called GT LIVE, and is a crossover event that introduces International Pro-level racing to the tuner market in the US.

A two-day event was planned for December 18 and 19, 2004 that, hopefully, aroused market interest by showcasing the attraction of the Japanese series. It also allowed Ameri-

can fans to see the first nighttime JGTC event under the newly installed lights at California Speedway in Fontana, Ca.

We'll have more on the actual event in the next issue of *Subiesport Magazine*, as it occurred after this issue went to press. In the meanwhile, we sent two victims, er, journalists to cover the media preview event held two months prior to the actual event.

For more info on GT LIVE, go to:
<http://www.jgtcusa.net>



» BRIEF OVERVIEW OF GT LIVE

TO FANS OF JDM-ONLY SUPERCARS and tuner vehicles, the GT LIVE event was a dream come true. At last they were able to watch legendary Japanese performance models in action.

The cars are represented in two classes, GT500 and GT300. The race cars are production-based and heavily modified. To add to the excitement of the event, organizers and the GT Association allowed cars from the popular American LeMans Series to enter as well, since this was a bonus round event for JGTC and not a points race. With over 25 cars confirmed from the JGTC series, the event organizers expected over 50 cars to make the start in the 200-mile race on December 18th, 2004, utilizing part of the infield and some banked corners of the two-mile oval at California Speedway. ■

With threatening skies and moisture in the air, the GT LIVE media event went on as planned. My preconceived notion of Southern California was 85 degrees and sunny, but this visit was nothing shy of the opposite. It was 65 degrees with the feeling of rain at any moment. This media-only event was nestled in the foothills of Fontana, 40 miles east of Los Angeles.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

9:35 a.m. We arrived at the track early to get the best views and angles on the cars in the paddock and garage areas. To our surprise the Cusco/Advan Subaru Impreza GT300 class car wasn't there, and our mood changed. While we are die-hard JGTC fans, we are first and foremost Subaru fanatics and hoped that this would be our chance to get up close and personal with the legendary GT300 car. As a consolation, Cusco USA did provide a US-spec black WRX-STi with all the JDM parts one could ever want installed on it as a stand-in.



Cusco brought along Katsuo Kobayashi, their team driver. Kobayashi, a 1998 GT300 winner, was to take various members of the media for demo rides in this ultra-trick STi later in the day. As a racer, instructor and STi owner, I was excited to have this opportunity to ride with an accomplished pro from the JGTC series.

As we walked through the garage area, one couldn't but help but notice the Nismo Skyline GT500 car surrounded by a half-dozen engineers and technicians. It wouldn't start right away, but when it did...there was nothing that could describe the sound. A crowd immediately formed and camera crews starting getting their boom mics as close to the action as possible.

I was starting to see, and even feel, the spark behind Randy Grube's dream, as the garage

area was full of excitement and even some of the media who were not so race savvy were eager to see these cars hit the track.

GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS

10:30 a.m. We were slated to meet and greet JGTC officials and promoters at a press conference. Surrounded by a dozen TV crews and a bevy of magazine editors, we waited for the action to begin, although we were somewhat distracted by the GT LIVE race girls, a group of lovely ladies with bodies to match their stunning smiles.

11:30 a.m. We were treated to a catered lunch while a huge plasma television played highlights from the previous JGTC events. I knew better than to fill up on sandwiches and cookies before hitting the tarmac at speed, so I had half a sandwich and bottled water. I didn't want to be the one guy who couldn't keep his food down in the corners.

12:30 p.m. The promoters assigned us to groups so we could all get a demo ride in a GT300 or GT500 racecar. There were also tuner cars with JGTC drivers taking media for demo rides. While some were taking their demo rides, others were making use of the tuner cars on a timed autocross course set up by GT LIVE officials, with a Nismo 350Z, MazdaSpeed RX8, and Nismo Sentra SE-R all providing potent autocross action. Additionally, there were 12hp go-karts arranged in a large open space with a course marked off by pylons. It was all foreplay to the main thrill of the day.

RACE TIME

2:30 p.m. As I walked toward what some consider the ultimate racecar, the Nissan



Skyline GTR, I was almost mad with excitement and anticipation. It felt weird to be getting suited up and putting on a helmet, and yet I wasn't going to drive. The Motul Nissan GTR team had a crew member to help me get into the left side of the right-hand-drive Skyline racecar. My 6' 3" frame was accustomed to fitting into a Recaro SPG racing seat, but the cockpit of the Skyline is much smaller and requires a smaller seat, which made it very, very tight for me. Once strapped in by a five-point harness, we got the thumbs-up from a crew chief, who in turn got clearance through his headset that the pit lane was clear.

My first impression of this car was that it shares certain similarities to the Porsche GT3 RS. Twenty-five-year-old 2003 JGTC GT300 champion Masataka Yanagida disengaged the clutch and we launched. First gear was short but he ran the revs high; second gear, the same. As he engaged third gear he nailed the throttle; the Skyline just slashed forward with the thrust of a tomahawk missile, then



an upshift, then another, until the dash read 260 kph, which equates to about 162 mph. Just as that processed in my now-numbered brain, I felt the 15-inch diameter, eight-piston Brembo monoblock calipers distribute even pressure on each rotor with a vengeance to match the acceleration. And in one, two, three, we were turning in for one of the infield turns.

We just dropped 120 mph in less time than it takes to unscrew a gas cap. By now, the adrenaline was fading out and the pain of the seating position was setting in. Despite the lack of circulation to my legs this was a

glorious moment, as the Skyline and I were finally one. The driver took an extra lap of the short 1.5-mile demo track and finally pitted. By now my legs and back were aching. But it was well worth it. I thanked Mr. Yanagida and watched him usher another unsuspecting victim into the ride of their lives.

CLOSING TIME

5:00 p.m. Even though I've experienced the world-renowned Porsche 911 GT3 RS race car and an FIA-campaigned Ferrari F40, and witnessed the IMSA BMW M3 GTR break track records, riding in a JGTC car with F1-level technology still stands as an experience all its own. The performance and technology of these machines has ushered in a new era of racing that American enthusiasts have only just begun to appreciate. The production of GT LIVE ensures that racing fans will be able to experience the series as fully as our international counterparts have been allowed to for the past decade. What a ride it will be. ■

